

VÖLUNDARKVITHA

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THE LAY OF VÖLUND

There was a king in Sweden named Nithuth. He had two sons and one daughter; her name was Bothvild. There were three brothers, sons of a king of the Finns: one was called Slagfith, another Egil, the third Völund. They went on snowshoes and hunted wild beasts. They came into Ulfdalir and there they built themselves a house; there was a lake there which is called Ulfsjar. Early one morning they found on the shore of the lake three women, who were spinning flax. Near them were their swan-garments, for they were Valkyries. Two of them were daughters of King Hlothver, Hlathguth the Swan-White and Hervor the All-Wise, and the third was Olrun, daughter of Kjar from Valland. These did they bring home to their hall with them. Egil took Olrun, and Slagfith Swan-White, and Völund All-Wise. There they dwelt seven winters; but then they flew away to find battles, and came back no more. Then Egil set forth on his snowshoes to follow Olrun, and Slagfith followed Swan-White, but Völund stayed in Ulfdalir. He was a most skillful man, as men know from old tales. King Nithuth had him taken by force, as the poem here tells.

1. Maids from the south | through Myrkwood flew, Fair and young, | their fate to follow; On the shore of the sea | to rest them they sat, The maids of the south, | and flax they spun.
2. | Hlathguth and Hervor, | Hlothver's children, And Olrun the Wise | Kjar's daughter was.
3. | One in her arms | took Egil then To her bosom white, | the woman fair.
4. Swan-White second,— | swan-feathers she wore, | And her arms the third | of the sisters threw Next round Völund's | neck so white.
5. There did they sit | for seven winters, In the eighth at last | came their longing again, (And in the ninth | did need divide them). The maidens yearned | for the murky wood, The fair young maids, | their fate to follow.
6. Völund home | from his hunting came, From a weary way, | the weather-wise bowman, Slagfith and Egil | the hall found empty, Out and in went they, | everywhere seeking.
7. East fared Egil | after Olrun, And Slagfith south | to seek for Swan-White; Völund alone | in Ulfdalir lay, |
8. Red gold he fashioned | with fairest gems, And rings he strung | on ropes of bast; So for his wife | he waited long, If the fair one home | might come to him.
9. This Nithuth learned, | the lord of the Njars, That Völund alone | in Ulfdalir lay; By night went his men, | their mail-coats were studded, Their shields in the waning | moonlight shone.
10. From their saddles the gable | wall they sought, And in they went | at the end of the hall; Rings they saw there | on ropes of bast, Seven hundred | the hero had.

11. Off they took them, | but all they left Save one alone | which they bore away. | .
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12. Völund home | from his hunting came, From a weary way, | the weather-wise bowman; A
brown bear's flesh | would he roast with fire; Soon the wood so dry | was burning well,
(The wind-dried wood | that Völund's was).
13. On the bearskin he rested, | and counted the rings, The master of elves, | but one he
missed; That Hlothver's daughter | had it he thought, And the all-wise maid | had come
once more.
14. So long he sat | that he fell asleep, His waking empty | of gladness was; Heavy chains | he
saw on his hands, And fetters bound | his feet together.

Völund spake:

15. "What men are they | who thus have laid Ropes of bast | to bind me now?"
Then Nithuth called, | the lord of the Njars: "How gottest thou, Völund, | greatest of elves,
These treasures of ours | in Ulfdalir?"

Völund spake:

16. "The gold was not | on Grani's way, Far, methinks, is our realm | from the hills of the
Rhine; I mind me that treasures | more we had When happy together | at home we were."
17. Without stood the wife | of Nithuth wise, And in she came | from the end of the hall; On
the floor she stood, | and softly spoke: "Not kind does he look | who comes from the
wood."

King Nithuth gave to his daughter Bothvild the gold ring that he had taken from the bast rope in Völund's house, and he himself wore the sword that Völund had had. The queen spake:

18. "The glow of his eyes | is like gleaming snakes, His teeth he gnashes | if now is shown The
sword, or Bothvild's | ring he sees; Let them straightway cut | his sinews of strength, And
set him then | in Sævarstath."

So was it done: the sinews in his knee-joints were cut, and he was set in an island which was near the mainland, and was called Sævarstath. There he smithied for the king all kinds of precious things. No man dared to go to him, save only the king himself. Völund spake:

19. "At Nithuth's girdle | gleams the sword That I sharpened keen | with cunningest craft,
(And hardened the steel | with highest skill;) The bright blade far | forever is borne, (Nor
back shall I see it | borne to my smithy;) Now Bothvild gets | the golden ring (That was
once my bride's,— | ne'er well shall it be.)"
20. He sat, nor slept, | and smote with his hammer, Fast for Nithuth | wonders he fashioned;
Two boys did go | in his door to gaze, Nithuth's sons, | into Sævarstath.
21. They came to the chest, | and they craved the keys, The evil was open | when in they
looked; To the boys it seemed | that gems they saw, Gold in plenty | and precious stones.

Völund spake:

22. "Come ye alone, | the next day come, Gold to you both | shall then be given; Tell not the maids | or the men of the hall, To no one say | that me you have sought."
23. | Early did brother | to brother call: "Swift let us go | the rings to see."
24. They came to the chest, | and they craved the keys, The evil was open | when in they looked; He smote off their heads, | and their feet he hid Under the sooty | straps of the bellows.
25. Their skulls, once hid | by their hair, he took, Set them in silver | and sent them to Nithuth; Gems full fair | from their eyes he fashioned, To Nithuth's wife | so wise he gave them.
26. And from the teeth | of the twain he wrought A brooch for the breast, | to Bothvild he sent it; |
27. Bothvild then | of her ring did boast, | | "The ring I have broken, I dare not say it | save to thee."

Völund spake:

28. "I shall weld the break | in the gold so well That fairer than ever | thy father shall find it, And better much | thy mother shall think it, And thou no worse | than ever it was."
29. Beer he brought, | he was better in cunning, Until in her seat | full soon she slept.

Völund spake:

"Now vengeance I have | for all my hurts,
Save one alone, | on the evil woman."

30. | | Quoth Völund: "Would | that well were the sinews Maimed in my feet | by Nithuth's men."
31. Laughing Völund | rose aloft, Weeping Bothvild | went from the isle, For her lover's flight | and her father's wrath.
32. Without stood the wife | of Nithuth wise, And in she came | from the end of the hall; But he by the wall | in weariness sat: "Wakest thou, Nithuth, | lord of the Njars?"

Nithuth spake:

33. "Always I wake, | and ever joyless, Little I sleep | since my sons were slain; Cold is my head, | cold was thy counsel, One thing, with Völund | to speak, I wish.
34. | "Answer me, Völund, | greatest of elves, What happed with my boys | that hale once were?"

Völund spake:

35. "First shalt thou all | the oaths now swear, By the rail of ship, | and the rim of shield, By the shoulder of steed, | and the edge of sword, That to Völund's wife | thou wilt work no ill, Nor yet my bride | to her death wilt bring, Though a wife I should have | that well thou knowest, And a child I should have | within thy hall.
36. "Seek the smithy | that thou didst set, Thou shalt find the bellows | sprinkled with blood; I smote off the heads | of both thy sons, And their feet 'neath the sooty | straps I hid.

37. "Their skulls, once hid | by their hair, I took, Set them in silver | and sent them to Nithuth;
Gems full fair | from their eyes I fashioned, To Nithuth's wife | so wise I gave them.
38. "And from the teeth | of the twain I wrought A brooch for the breast, | to Bothvild I gave it;
Now big with child | does Bothvild go, The only daughter | ye two had ever."

Nithuth spake:

39. "Never spakest thou word | that worse could hurt me, Nor that made me, Völund, | more
bitter for vengeance; There is no man so high | from thy horse to take thee, Or so doughty
an archer | as down to shoot thee, While high in the clouds | thy course thou takest."
40. Laughing Völund | rose aloft, But left in sadness | Nithuth sat. |
41. Then spake Nithuth, | lord of the Njars: "Rise up, Thakkrath, | best of my thralls, Bid
Bothvild come, | the bright-browed maid, Bedecked so fair, | with her father to speak."
42. | | "Is it true, Bothvild, | that which was told me;
Once in the isle | with Völund wert thou?"

Bothvild spake:

43. "True is it, Nithuth, | that which was told thee, Once in the isle | with Völund was I, An hour
of lust, | alas it should be! Nought was my might | with such a man, Nor from his strength |
could I save myself."

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